

VZCZCXRO2332  
RR RUEHDBU RUEHFL RUEHKW RUEHLA RUEHROV RUEHSR  
DE RUEHRL #3395/01 3340901  
ZNY CCCCC ZZH  
R 300901Z NOV 06 ZDK  
FM AMEMBASSY BERLIN  
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC 6230  
INFO RUEHZL/EUROPEAN POLITICAL COLLECTIVE  
RUCNFRG/FRG COLLECTIVE

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 BERLIN 003395

SIPDIS

SIPDIS

E.O. 12958: DECL: 11/29/2021

TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [GM](#)

SUBJECT: CONVENTION STRENGTHENS MERKEL IN PARTY, GOVERNMENT

REF: BERLIN 3333

Classified By: DCM John Koenig. Reason: 1.4(b) and (d)

¶1. (U) Summary. Angela Merkel's re-election as party leader with an unexpected 93 percent of the vote, together with poor performances by her principal rivals and good results for her proteges, has helped to consolidate her leadership of the CDU. Her strong showing may also boost her position vis-a-vis her Social Democratic coalition partners. Contacts at the convention attributed the outcome to a variety of factors, with party loyalty to the Chancellor (as opposed to personal loyalty to Merkel) and the divisive performance by North Rhine-Westphalia (NRW) Minister-President Ruettggers as perhaps the most important. The sharp debate over the party's social profile likely also increased support for Merkel's call for cooperation and reconciliation between the party's social and pro-market wings. The rhetoric of major speakers, including Merkel, was strongly against Turkish membership in the EU and in favor of extending the lives of Germany's nuclear power plants - two issues where the CDU/CSU and SPD take opposite views. End Summary.

#### Election of the Party Leadership

-----

¶2. (U) The main purpose of the CDU National Convention, held in Dresden Nov. 27-28, was to (re-)elect the party leadership. Reftel reports the concerns which had led some to suspect the Chancellor might be re-elected as party leader, but with numbers lower than the 88 percent received in 2004. To respond to these concerns, contacts had predicted Merkel would deliver a partisan speech to reassure the voters that the CDU's views were being and would be prominent in government policy. While she made this point, her hour-long speech was in fact largely moderate in tone -- more descriptive than prescriptive and taking only a few swipes at the SPD. She did, however, extensively praise CDU Ministers-President, including Ruettggers, at the opening of her speech. She outlined her government's success, which included improved relations with the U.S. based on mutual trust and a more forthright human rights policy. She dwelt at length on the economic challenges of globalization. Her real message came at the end of her speech: Merkel welcomed and endorsed proposals on social and economic policy from both wings of the party; she praised the contributions of both wings to maintaining both freedom and justice as core principles of the CDU, but urged both sides to work cooperatively. Though many of our contacts thought the speech was lackluster, at its conclusion she received an extended standing ovation.

¶3. (U) NRW M-P Ruettggers followed Merkel with a speech that consisted largely of justifying his call for more emphasis on social welfare in party policy. This opened an extended debate on the issue. In the end, delegates followed Chancellor Merkel's advice and approved two rather contradictory resolutions on the matter by wide margins.

Following the debate the serious business of elections began.

Merkel was returned to office with an unexpected 93 percent of the vote. General Secretary Pofalla, who delivered a very dull speech and had been fingered as a potential scapegoat for dissatisfaction with Merkel, received an equally unexpected 82 percent - no triumph but not low enough to be considered a punishment either. The seal on Merkel's success came with the election of the four deputy chairmen: Merkel protege and Education Minister Annette Schavan led the polling with 78 percent; M-Ps Koch and Wulff trailed with 68 and 67 percent respectively, and Ruettggers (predicted beforehand to do badly) drew only 58 percent support.

¶4. (U) Delegates and party leaders offered multiple reasons for the unexpectedly good outcome for Merkel: Loyalty to a CDU Chancellor was a leading factor - the delegates recognized they could not weaken the Chancellor or the CDU in government. Unhappiness with the divisive criticism of Merkel and government policy from the M-Ps, notably Ruettggers, and support for Merkel's call for cooperation not only boosted Merkel, but also was the leading reason for the poor showings by the Ministers-President. We would also not discount the impact of the positives in Merkel's speech - the achievements of the government and the positive economic news in recent months.

#### Other Issues

¶5. (U) In addition to the elections and the debate on the party's social orientation, the convention had just two bits of substantive business to accomplish. By an overwhelming majority the party adopted a resolution on foreign policy that (possibly excepting Croatia) called for a halt to

BERLIN 00003395 002 OF 002

further EU expansion until the EU constitution is completed and renewed the offer of a "privileged partnership" with Turkey. The convention also adopted a resolution on education that shifted the party's policy on early childhood care away from direct state support for families toward more support for early childhood education.

¶6. (U) Turkey's relationship to the EU and integration of (mainly Turkish) immigrants into German society were important rhetorical themes for all the leading speakers. In his populist and energetic address to the convention, Bavarian M-P and CSU leader Edmund Stoiber drew great applause with lines such as "we do not want the churches in our land to be ever fewer and in their place the mosques to be ever more" and "The cross belongs in German schools, parliaments, and courtrooms." Another frequent theme that caught fire with the delegates (and was the single largest applause line in Merkel's speech) was the call for extending the lives of Germany's nuclear power plants. CDU Bundestag caucus leader Kauder used the issue against the Greens and, to a degree, the SPD when he said "We cannot afford to renounce nuclear power. Even the dreamers, who want to convert our entire land into a wind farm, will one day see this."

#### Comment

¶7. (C) Comment: Merkel's success in Dresden exceeded most predictions; perhaps even her own expectations. She failed to convert Ruettggers and many others with her message of cooperation and reconciliation and therein could lie the seeds of further discord. However, the signal from the party rank-and-file was clear: M-Ps will not profit from creating trouble for Merkel. One contact told us, that whether intended or not, an important effect of the vote was to end any pretensions Koch, Wulff or Ruettggers may have had to being "crown prince" of the CDU. Only Ruettggers may fail to have understood the message. In accepting his poor re-election showing, he sourly announced his dissatisfaction

with the result but proclaimed his determination to continue the fight in the party for social justice. With Dresden behind her, though, Merkel will be in a much stronger position to quash trouble from the party left. It is reasonable to suppose that success in Dresden would strengthen the Chancellor's hand in the Grand Coalition as well. End Comment.

TIMKEN JR